THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
WEBINAR

RESTORING TRUST IN GOVERNMENT THROUGH IMPROVED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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Opening Remarks:

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Panel Discussion:

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PROCEEDINGS

MS. GOGER: Hello and welcome to our event today on building trust in government through improving customer experience. My name is Annelies Goger and I'm a Fellow in the Brookings Metro Program and the Brookings Institution.

And today I'm really excited to bring to you a panel where we will bring people at the local level, at the state level, and the Federal level to discuss how to actually implement customer experience, because it's really easy to say that you want services to be user friendly and that user experience should be pretty simple, but in the end it may take actually quite a lot of work behind the scenes and some insights that I think we can glean from previous work that's been done in this area to help people who are new to the space or just trying to get started in this work.

So we're really excited to be here today. And what we're going to do is first we're honored to have Amira Boland here from the Office of Management and Budget. So she's actually leading the implementation of the customer experience work that's happening at OMB, which is part of an executive order that President Biden signed on December 13, which essentially says that we shouldn't be burdening American citizens and the people with paperwork, especially the most vulnerable and people who have the least resources to handle and navigate that paperwork because it really undermines not only trust in government, but also the values that we have in the U.S. for equity and access. And so in thinking about this executive order we wanted to have Amira share a little bit about what the Federal Government is doing to implement the executive order. And then we're going to have a panel discussion with three people at the state level, local level, and then someone who works across different agencies and levels, to talk about some of their work and answer questions around this topic.

And then we want to make sure that this is an engaging conversation that you can engage in as the audience, so if you have questions that you'd like to share with us you can send them on Twitter at #Govtservices or you can email us at Events@Brookings.edu.

So, without further ado, I'd like to introduce Amira, and she can share with us her thoughts on where this implementation is and why it's important, and also some resources that are available to share.

MS. BOLAND: Good morning. Thank you so much, Annelies. Grateful to you and Sha for prompting this with your article and Brookings for hosting this conversation on such an important topic. So grateful to be here today.

I know folks, including myself, are eager to hear from the panel, so I'll try and give a brief update on happenings across the Federal landscape before we hear their reflections on what this means for folks on the front line and their lessons learned in cities and states. And as a former Georgia resident, I've been particularly interested in following Nikhil's work. And I don't know if you all know this, but you can actually print your vehicle tags at self-service kiosks in Krogers there, which I definitely appreciated. That was a few years ago, though, so I'm sure they're even more advanced than that now.

For those keeping tabs, we've actually had a pretty thrilling week here in Federal customer experience. Part of our broader, you know, incredible moment in the history of our Nation as we recover from a global pandemic, promote prosperity and economic growth, advance equity, and tackle the climate crisis, the needs of the people of the United States, informed by in particular an understanding of how they experience government should drive the priorities for service delivery that we focus on.

In his first joint session to Congress, the president said we have to prove that democracy still works, that government still works, and that we can deliver for our people. And, you know, that's the guiding spirit for so much of our work today. And the

Federal Government interacts with millions of people each day and provides vital services during some of the most critical moments in their lives. And we're arguably one of the most complex service delivery organizations in the world. We are collectively the Nation's largest employer, the world's largest buyer, one in four Americans is covered by Medicaid, in its peak in Q2 last year the IRS was receiving more than 1,500 calls per second, TSA screens more than 2 million passengers a day, one in eight Americans, which is around 42 million people, are managing student loans, four million American become newly eligible for Social Security benefits each year for the retirement income, and approximately 25 million individuals and families survived a federally recognized natural disaster last year. However, too many people have been historically underserved and experienced marginalization, disenfranchisement, and lost opportunity as a result of the way in which our critical Federal services were and are delivered. People have to navigate a tangled web of government websites, offices, and phone numbers to access the service they depend on. And many times they're confused as to whether — or — nor do they care though as to whether a service is coming from their local government, their state government, or their federal government.

In recent years, the annual paperwork burden imposed by executive departments and agencies on the public has been in excess of 9 billion hours. And we all agree that that number is too high. It's currently absorbed by all Americans through their interactions with government. These difficult experiences that individuals and entities can encounter when they're interacting with government are known as administrative burdens. And we increasingly know that where there are administrative burdens, they do not fall equally on all communities and can lead to the underutilization of critical services often by the people who need them most. Whether someone is searching for vaccine safety information or claiming retirement benefits, receiving health insurance, passing through a security checkpoint, or checking the status of a farm loan application, Americans expect government services to be responsive to their needs. And as we are continuing to say, every iteration between the government and the public, whether it involves filing taxes or renewing a passport, is an opportunity to deliver the value, service, and efficiency that the public expects and deserves.

And when we don't meet expectations, as you all articulated in your piece, we create a trust gap. And while trust in government is a noisy measure, it's influenced by everything from your school board to whether or not you voted for the president, we also know that there's a large component of that, is shaped by people's own experiences with government. And that's something that we can control. And that gap that people are increasingly experiencing as a result of improved private sector, even state and local service delivery, particularly coming through a global pandemic in which everyone else have gone to this mobile first, self-serve, 24/7 assistance model, and what we as a Federal Government often show up with erodes trust in our competency and reliability. This administrative and this president, from his day one executive order on advancing equity to his executive order in December that you mentioned on customer experience to the whole of government strategy in the president's management agenda, is committed to ensuring an effective, equitable, and accountable government that meets the needs of its people. When it's a disaster survivor, a single parent, an immigrant, a small business owner, or a veteran that waits months for the government to process benefits to which they are entitled, that lost time is a significant cost not only for that individual, but in the aggregate for our Nation as a whole. And having an executive order say that explicitly is game changing for people in our field.

This executive order had a few items in it that are of note for this crowd. It included 36 concrete tangible commitments of agencies to improve specific services. And we posted a quarterly update on the process of implementing on these commitments on performance.gov. If you go to /cx and then to our blog section, we actually tick through a number of these items and where agencies are at. And it was important to us to be able to provide interim progress steps. So we don't just have to like commit to something and go quiet for two years, we wanted to share steps along the way.

The executive order also makes it no longer acceptable for the Federal agencies to say well, that's a state-run program, so, you know, that's not really within our purview. But it explicitly calls out the Federal responsibility for programs that are state administered. So recognizing that we own the delivery chain and ultimately if the public holds us accountable, so we must ourselves. And there's a lot of levers that we have, you know, more that we can do to provide clear guidance, facilitate data exchanges, and provide common tools and platforms to states.

The executive order also positions the OMB director as the stop gap between agencies. So too often, as many of us have experienced, data sharing agreements are good initiative stall when it's unclear who the decision maker is. It also elevates the responsibility of customer experience within agencies and builds and accountability framework for assessing and publicly reporting on service performance, reinforcing and codifying our government wide CX guidance that we issued a few years ago and have continue to refine. Also yesterday we really –– specific services that our high impact service providers are going to be focusing their improvement efforts on.

And I'll quickly note that I've connected with several state and local entities that have taken our federal guidance as a baseline to build their own governor's executive orders. And there's a really interesting example out of Pennsylvania and an executive order that their governor signed around customer experience. You know, they've used service performance measurement frameworks. We talked with some folks on the West Coast about how they're using some of the measures that we have in our guidance. So consider looking that up if you are working at that level. It's all on our website. And don't hesitate to reach out to us to discuss it. We love being a thought partner with state and local governments as they're thinking about it. It also really helps us to learn and grow and improve our own frameworks.

And, finally, I'll just say that one of my favorite parts of all of these exciting updates is that the executive order aligns across government service delivery with key moments in people's lives. So the Federal Government was created over more than two centuries into a patchwork of agencies and statutory responsibilities spread out across the bureaucracy, and this executive order is helping the Federal government to work better as a 21st century service delivery enterprise.

So a mother should not have to figure out whether a program is ultimately run by HHS or the Department of Labor or USDA or SSA or HUD, a disaster survivor should not have to go through the damage to their home or business with the government more than once, and a retiree should not have to fear important choices like what age they claim retirement benefits and whether their Part D plan covers their prescriptions. So yesterday we shared charters signed by the deputy secretaries forming inter agency teams to tackle moments like these without our agency hats on, but rather with a human centered focus on how the American public interacts navigating across agencies and even levels of government. And this summer we'll be conducting discovery sprints to ultimately put forward a punch list of priority pain points to address and we have leadership recognition that this is the hard systems change work that will take a sustained effort. It's not just going to be some fancy new apps and websites, it's going to be rethinking forms, guidance to states, how whole processes are designed.

So I just want to thank you all again for being here and your commitment to this work. It's sometimes the unsexy parts of how government works, but it's also the work that can be transformational when we're trying to drive improved outcomes for our Nation. And I would encourage you all to go to performance.gov/cx and performance.gov/equity. Last week agencies also released more than 90 plans on how their advancing equity, a historic milestone in our country. And you can learn more about all of our life experience work and progress on our EO implementation, as well as some resources that we've provided to high impact service providers, but made open so that state and local entities can use them as well.

So, Annelies, I'll turn it back over to you.

MS. GOGER: Thank you so much, Amira. And I really want to highlight your point about how this is a game changing moment on the one hand, but also a long-term shift on the other hand. So I think you really hit on some key points. Thank you so much for your time today.

So now I will shift to introduce our panel. You all can come on. And I do want to mention that those of you — you may see Meera Raja is here, who has graciously come in because Brenna had an emergency come up. And so we want to thank her for stepping in at the last minute, because she is one of Brenna's colleagues. And she'll be talking about the local perspective. And then we also have Nikhil Deshpande from the State of Georgia, and my co-author, Sha Hwang, from Nava PBC, who works across various agencies and programs and can bring that perspective as well.

And so for those of you who aren't familiar with our piece, it's available on Brookings.edu and it's about if you want to build trust in government, start with customer experience.

So with that, I wanted to give you all a chance to just introduce yourself a bit and share with us, if you can, since you've been working in this world for a really long time and there may be people in the audience who are new to this work, what is some of the work that you're most proud of or if you could share a moment where things sort of clicked and came together for you and made you motivated to do this work for the long-term.

And I'll just start –– Sha, why don't you start and we can just kind of go around.

MR. HWANG: Thank you. Thank you, Annelies. Really, really proud and excited to be here.

My name is Sha Hwang. Again, I'm the COO and one of the co-founders of Nava. We're a public benefit corporation working across Federal, state, and local agencies to help build public institutions that can earn that trust of their constituents. We got our start as a part of the healthcare.gov tech surge kind of rescue effort over eight years ago now. And I think a lot of maybe the animating force that brought us to start Nava in the first place was –– at least from a negative frame, the view of and seeing so many large vendors who have received millions or billions in contracts who have kind of taken on the implementation role for these government programs and then failed to deliver. And then it's the agency, it's the public program that gets the blame where trust is eroded. But it's that private sector role and responsibility that I think has animated a lot of forming Nava as a public benefit corporation and the work that we've taken on.

I think on a more positive note, I think something I'm most proud of recently is the last couple of years working as a vendor with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts on the design and implementation of their paid family and medical leave program. So there's not many states doing this. Massachusetts, I'm incredibly proud of DFML for what they've done to ensure, one, the roll out last January was smooth, doing all this –– you know, starting up a department through a pandemic, rolling out new legislation. But I think what really resonates with the conversation today for me is almost the last year and a half now of work that's been done after the roll out of iteration. Week over week, month over month, just ruthlessly learning from user feedback, from candle times, to improve processing times, to improve enrollment, to improve disbursement times, reduce call center load. You know the DFML program has now disbursed I think over $900 million in claims across the state, around $2 million a day and is I think in this year two of the program it's been exciting to see renewed interest, the increased interest in the program, partially because of that trust and consistency that's been displayed since day one. So I think that's something I'm just incredibly proud to be a part of and DFML gets all the credit here for what they've done to stand this up.

MS. GOGER: Thank you. And, yeah, I think hits on just how — you know, you don't really hear about customer experience until things go bad sometimes, right. But when it goes really well, you don't really hear about it. So appreciate you highlighting that.

All right. How about Nikhil? How about you?

MR. DESHPANDE: Yeah, thank you for having me on this panel. Really excited to be here.

So I'm Nikhil Deshpande. I'm the Chief Digital Officer for the State of Georgia and part of the Georgia technology authority. We have a centralized group, which is the digital services group, that works with multiple state agencies. So we have the benefit of working with one state agency, just using all of that learning towards other agencies that we work and improving service delivery.

I want to say about six or seven years ago we truly started approaching this user centered approach and design thinking in getting agencies educated for service delivery. We always believed that — well, one of the thing that I should say here is Georgia is a state where every agency has their own budget and there really isn't any centralized mandate for them to align to a common look and feel and a common user experience. But, you know, just because there isn't a mandate, there is no reason why we shouldn't do that. And that's exactly where I think we formed that alliance at the agency level with people coming together and agreeing that user centered approach towards service delivery is really what we should be looking at, because then regardless of any leadership changes, you know, when the key stakeholders stay the same as far as the values are concerned, that's where we're able to deliver better.

One of the things I would say I'm extremely proud of is when we were realigning our efforts. We literally went around Georgia and spoke with people. We interviewed them and it took us like hundreds of mile of travel and documenting and everything, but we were able to speak with the people who are in metro as opposed to rural areas or coastal areas, mountain areas, and we realized, like everyone has a very different challenge. And we were not considering a lot of that when we were designing services. Because we have a distributive model, every agency sometimes, and to Sha's point, you know, we use different vendors for service implementation and there isn't always a way to represent who the users are. So we tried our best, and we're still doing that, to bring that element into any planning. And we were able to get at least the information layer to begin with before moving onto the service, the transactional service on a common platform where we have common content models and a look and feel based out of a design system that any person now interacts with a state property in Georgia, they can at least know where they are and they don't have to relearn every time they switch from department of revenue to department of labor to public health.

And now we are truly focusing our energies on delivering those services in a very omni channel way. And measuring what we are delivering has become a very key part in the way we plan what come in our road map.

MS. GOGER: Thank you.

I actually have a quick clarification. Could you tell me, you said you have a lot of vendors. Have you integrated user experience into the RFPs? Or into your contracts with those vendors?

MR. DESHPANDE: We have begun to. We have started asking specifically for their experience, we have started asking for deliverables. And two things — one is the user study and the user experience piece where we have some information. So, for example, if you work with a certain agency, we already have some person as we already have a lot of research done, so we can work and save some time for the vendor. But we do look at how experienced a certain vendor is in their previous projects.

The other big part is accessibility. We used to have kind of what you would call as a check box, where like you just want to make sure that you deliver services that are accessible. But now we want to make sure that the vendors actually show. They agree to a certain level of (inaudible) and then we have a — in Georgia Tech a partner that does neutral audits of all the service delivery to make sure that indeed the services delivered are accessible.

MS. GOGER: Thank you so much. And I think one of the things that stood out to me around what you just said is shifting to user experience focus from what is maybe a question in some people's mind. And I would say that probably the place where may people are starting from is more of a prioritization on compliance and making sure that administratively you're supposed to check certain boxes and show that you're delivering X services in a certain timeline, but not necessarily doing it in a way that that end user finds accessible or easy or, you know, something that they're aware of to begin with.

So I think that that's really key in terms of what the education was that you were trying to describe. It's really — I think it's important, the education of staff. And we'll get to that a bit later too.

So now I want to turn to you, Meera. If you could share a little bit about yourself and some of the work that you're most proud of or things that have really resonated with you.

MS. RAJA: Yeah, absolutely. Thanks, Annelies, and thank you, everyone, for having me today and letting me step in for Brenna. This is a great opportunity.

So my name is Meera Raja. I'm currently at P33 in Chicago, which is a nonprofit focused on driving inclusive growth for Chicago's tech sector. Actually most of what I'm going to be speaking about I'm going to draw from my previous experience, which is at City Tech Collaborative in Chicago.

So City Tech was an urban solutions accelerator in Chicago with a goal of solving sort of complex urban challenges, bringing solutions to that no one sector can do. So it's very cross sector, very collaborative. We worked very closely with local government, as well as like big corporations, startups, universities, you know, sort of bringing everyone together and trying to develop solutions for spaces like mobility or connected infrastructure, health and happiness within cities. So sort of across the board.

Part of my role there was working on all of our resident engagement work with this idea that if you are developing solutions for a city, the end user is more than likely going to be that resident. So how do you ensure that that resident voice is included within your solution, the entire arc of your solution, right. And so we did that primarily through a group called Our Civic User Testing Group, our CUT Group. It was a group of about 1,600 residents in Chicago that had been built up over time –– before my time, so it was not started by me –– just to give credit where credit was due, but continued through a group of about 1,600 residents in Chicago who we could call on to be able to give sort of feedback on early-stage development of these types of solutions. A lot of what we did was sort of tech enabled solutions, but certainly there's a lot of non tech pieces to tech enabled solutions as well.

And so we were not embedded in the government, but we worked closely with it, which was an interesting space to be in because there's a lot of flex that you can have if you're not part of it, but there's a lot of barriers to sort of working closely as well.

And so I think what I am potentially most proud of with that work is thinking really carefully about how we can incorporate this — this is a challenging thing to incorporate. Nikhil, you talked about it a little bit. Like how do you actually bring this into government, how do you make this standard practice. And sometimes I feel like people think about it as all or nothing, right. Like you come in and you have to do all of this, otherwise it's not worth it to do, otherwise you just check the box and go on. And I think we thought really creatively about what pieces along this arc of development can you insert resident engagement. Ideally, it would be across all of it, but maybe that's not possible. Well, then where would it be most impactful, how can we get the most out of — you know, how can we get the most people, how can we make sure we're doing this fairly in a way that the people we're trying to reach were we pay them, how do we make sure it's along their timeline. So sort of on both ends of it, thinking about how can we put up best practices to be able to really get some piece of this incorporated and solutions.

MS. GOGER: Thank you. And I think your point about many people think that when you're talking about digital services for digital transformation and user experience, many people think this is a tech project, but actually what I think you're going to hear in all of these stories is that it's more of a kind of organizational change process project and culture project than staff education project and not — like the technology enables some of that change, but it's not the technology that's changing essentially. And so I appreciate that point.

And I was wondering, just staying with you for a minute here, if you were speaking to a city or a county leader that's in the audience who's new to this but interested in getting started, what would be your advice on where to start or how — what to do first and how to focus. You know, you could probably be tempted, like you said, to boil the ocean, but what — how do you focus and scope the work in the beginning?

MS. RAJA: Yeah, absolutely. That's a great question.

I think there are a couple of different ways that you can do it, right. I think first of all, thinking about is this something that you are going to do internally. And, Nikhil, you talked about how you all went and talked to a number of people, is that sort of where it's going to go, are you going to work with an organization like City Tech that has this sort of built up, right. And if you were going to do that, either way, what does that — what does your user experience like process look like and what resources do you need for it. If you're doing it internally, obviously you need some of the knowledge, you need the group of people you're going to be talking to. You know, from our perspective, we really push on paying participants, so making sure — it's a big commitment and people's time is valuable, and so making sure that they were paid. If you're thinking about being inclusive, how are you driving that inclusivity. Often times in certain spaces, depending on what you're thinking about, like what space you're thinking about being inclusive in, a lot of times you're calling upon the same people to always talk in those types of things. So how do you make sure that you're not being a burden to that select group of people who are always being called upon to talk about this issue, but also being able to get that perspective as well.

And then if all of that — if you are thinking about doing that with an outside organization, you know, one of the barriers we faced often was like a procurement issue, right. Like it's standard practice, and especially for — we're paying the residents, we have to be paid to be able to pay the residents. Like we weren't — you know, we're a nonprofit, but how do you get funds allocated for something like that. If it's internal or if it's external, how are you going to be able to work with the group.

MS. GOGER: Thank you.

And I do want to remind folks that they can ask questions with #Govtservices or emailing Events@Brookings.edu.

Nikhil, I was wondering –– yeah, I saw you motioning, but I'm curious what your thoughts are and what you have to add. And I also thought –– you know, I think we talked about this earlier, one of the questions from the audience was about well how do you actually –– what is the KPI for measuring trust and how does that fit into starting to do this work?

MR. DESHPANDE: Yeah. I just wanted to add to what Meera said. So where working with a partner is very helpful in a couple of ways where it is incredibly hard for us to justify say buying Amazon gift cards to give out to participants and, you know, you can't expect them to truly be invested without having some sort of like compensation model in there.

Another thing that we also noticed was that people are a little more frank and honest when they know that you haven't worked on something and it's a third-party who's asking the questions. For some reason –– I don't know. Maybe as Georgians we're really not nice and don't want to hurt feelings. But we have always found that when they know that we have not worked on something. But really it boils down to the budget issue of like you can just rely on a partner and they can take care of those things. So I just wanted to add that for some of the folks who want to take this on. And then I tried it and, you know, our budget just –– office just did not allow, and for all the right reasons of course.

But to your question of the KPI for trust, long time ago, you know, we were talking about exactly this, even before CX was mainstream conversation. And I truly believe that like trust is what government should look at a world currency because we are –– you know, for all the reasons (inaudible) about the way we deliver services. Like there is no other competition and that should not make us feel like, you know, well, they don't have another avenue, so they better deal with what we have, right. Because a lot of people when they talk about customers, government customers — I mean these are not government customers, these are the same people who interact with Amazons and the Apples and when they come interact with us, like why should they lower their expectations? There are a few ways where we truly could put some sort of value on experience and measuring those experiences, because it does –– it is true that the omni channel experience is very important. And even the failure of one channel just resets the overall just lived experience of certain consumer in building that trust. And if it doesn't matter if like three of your channels have it really well, but like if they experience any friction in one, you know, they will either publicly talk about their bad experience or they will just like start calling you. Essentially as an organization, having a good experience truly relates to how much do you invest in your call centers, how much do you really have to keep up with your call lines.

I can give you just one very simple example. We used to get a lot of questions about passports. Now, people who are a little, I guess, you know, aware of the different levels of government, they know that this is handled by the Department of State. But for maybe a regular person they just see state and they look at, you know, the state, right. So sometimes they would call, stay on the line for a long time, and then when they actually have their chance to ask the question, I mean they're in the least mood for a civic lesson at that point. So we just preemptively created that content. We made sure that it is current and we started offering that through our chat bot. You know, any of our automated channels. And saw like the calls for that particular question go down.

But I thought like these are some of the things that you just have to kind of reach out and do and not say well this is the boundary here, because for people it is the government. They don't really want to, you know, learn more about like the lines between the city, county, state, and Federal. They just look at us as government and they just want to be, you know, experiencing the same level they experience with the Amazons and the Apples.

MS. GOGER: Yeah, I appreciate that. And I think to some extent the KPIs or the indicators that you're using to see if you're getting better will vary by program or by process. And I know, Sha, you probably have some examples of ways that you've set like some goals for yourself. Maybe you could share some of those?

MR. HWANG: Yeah, that's something we try to work with. Every program or agency we work with is like what — you know, from their perspective, what's the North Star, what does success look like. And for different agencies and different programs that means different things, right. On the appeals side that might mean reducing the average processing time or being transparent for veterans about what the wait time will be, understanding that the wait time might be very long given the current state of operations or current state of backlog. But it's better to be upfront and clear about what that wait time is than for — getting into the weeds — but, for example, when a veteran sometimes submits additional documentation that they don't understand. Because they haven't heard back, they're submitting additional documentation, but it's triggering all these additional work flows on the back end. That's actually delaying their case even further.

So metrics and goals like that I think have been really helpful. Also things like participation rate. You know, how many people who are eligible are able to actually receive the benefits. Churn, like for things like SNAP or things that need kind of recertifications, who's –– during those cycles, who's churning out of the program, how many people just basically give up or can't keep jumping through those hurdles. Or, like Nikhil mentioned, like looking at the load on call centers. You know, when we talk with call center representatives it's been some of the most powerful experiences for us. And you're talking to folks who — you know, from top to bottom, from call center to program leadership, want to help, right. Call center staff take a lot of pride in their work, in being able to help the problems that can't be worked through through normal means. But if half of their calls are handling people's password resets, then they're not doing the work they came here to do that they're proud of, that the bottlenecks are kind of elsewhere.

So I think those types of measurements I think have been useful to see where our — to Amira's earlier talking points –– like where are the administrative burdens in this process, where are the obstacles, and how to kind of reduce that.

MS. GOGER: Thank you very much.

And I was wondering, with your experience working across states and programs, what are some of the common pitfalls you see when people try to bring in user experience? And I think I love the point you're making here that one of the users is the staff, right. The front-line staff are users. And if you're making their life miserable and they are frustrated because they're dealing with all these frustrated customers all day, that's another way to think about user experience. That's pretty critical. And if you're making it hard for people to implement a program by design and not thinking about the staff, then that's a critical thing.

But anyway, I wanted to ask you about just common pitfalls that you see when people get started in this and ways that people can maybe learn from some of your experience. And I'll pass it around for others to add to this, but I wanted to start with you.

MR. HWANG: I think there's many like pitfalls and traps to fall into. I think the most like positive frame I think from my perspective is like how in every effort or in every new or existing kind of program that exists, what is that loop between the policy or regulations decisions between the kind of program and operational decisions, between the kind of implementation or kind of service delivery factors and teams. And then the people that are affected, whether they are tools or program for government employees or whether they're tools or systems or programs for residents at the city or state or kind of Federal level. And I think when those — the pitfalls come when those feedback loops are years long, when they're not connected. We've seen some things like okay, the data of this program is collected at the end of the year and then a report is issued a year afterwards to show what the challenges are. And by then, by the time the program people are receiving that information it's two years out of date. And by the time they can respond to that, then it's three years since when some of those initial things were made.

So that's something I think we've found as incredibly successful, is just — even just light things, like creating a regular meeting space for these various sides to compare notes to see, okay, what are the upcoming draft regulations, having someone technical in the room that can think out loud or workshop. Like what are the security implications of this, what are the privacy implications of implementing regulations this way and how do we rethink that. And I think something incredibly — you know, I think another really proud example, something DFML did in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was, you know, in the original and most of these — all of these paid family leave programs, you know, you're applying — you're enrolling in this benefit or applying for this leave after the baby is born. I don't know how many folks listening or on the panel are parents, but that's — you know, after a baby is born is probably the least time when you want to be jumping through a bunch of government forms or figuring out who to call for what or what agency or what level of government you need to sort through. So DFML, you know, in doing a lot of this user research and looking at some of the pain points identified this as a really high impact move and updated the regulations so that new parents can apply for this benefit before the baby arrives. And I think that's just an incredibly human centered perspective that just reduces the administrative burden on the user side, reduces administration burden on the administrative side because they're not handling all these calls about people who are stressed and tired and it's the last thing they want to do. And it's just better outcomes overall in terms of participation rate.

So I think that's an incredibly I think — that's like the best that you can hope for is like being able to actually influence the structure of the program by listening to what the lived experiences are of people going through and trying to be benefitted from them.

MS. GOGER: Right. And so I think that the key takeaway for me here is just it's not this sort of top down. Like you start with the policy and then you build the tech and then you get the experience, but actually how do you build all of those things in these loops of changing things in an iterative way. And that's really how you can make things come together in a more timely way and more responsive way. I think that's a really critical point.

Do either of you have a — Meera or Nikhil, have anything to add around pitfalls?

MS. RAJA: Yes, actually I wanted to add on that point. And also just as a reasonably new parent, that's amazing that that happened. So just to speak to your question is there anything there — yes, very tired, very confused. So it was nice to do that in advance.

So I think to speak exactly to this point, that Sha you were saying and, Annelies, you sort of summarized, is this idea of where along the — like it — you know, again, ideally you want this sort of iterative approach, you want the user experience across the entire building process, but thinking about it early and thinking about it late, I think sometimes some of those things fall off, right. Like the way I like to think about it is there's sort of the understanding the opportunity piece of it, where you can bring people in and that's a lot of times where you go talk to the community and the user and understand like what are they looking for and are you solving for that. Then there's the build piece of it where, you know, whatever that build looks like, how do you get people to test it while it's being built. A lot of times I think it stops there. I think there's another piece of it that people don't think about, is how are you rolling this out, how is this thing getting socialized, how are people knowing it exists and using it, right. And I think that lot of times isn't something that doesn't get followed through. And I think that's a little bit of a barrier, because you can build the best thing that works really well and if no one knows it exist, it's not very useful to anyone.

MS. GOGER: Great point.

Nikhil, did you have anything to add or anything you'd like to reflect on?

MR. DESHPANDE: These are all really very valid points. The only thing that I can add to that is I do feel like there should be a consistent level of education that should happen within organizations. Because the biggest I guess, you know, hurdle that I have seen is sometimes when people change, even though a lot of these processes are part of a certain implementation plan, and if they don't prioritize them, then I have seen that being stifled. And that, you know, at the end of the day, to Sha's point, where if it starts creating a gap of that feedback loop, then truly we are not doing justice to rolling that service out.

And I absolutely want to echo Meera's point. You know, we have seen that within, you know, Georgia where like there's so many services that only after we started socializing and talking about them and having an open conversation on social media where we started out picking the usage of that because before that people just didn't know that they were there. And they would just (inaudible) text and text and subtext on websites. And having that access and having a roll out plan or even just like a marketing plan for new services is very important.

MS. GOGER: Thank you. Yeah, I agree.

And I think that kind of leads into my next question, which his getting at the staff and the people implementing this new focus on customer experience. So we had several questions about how do you motivate staff to do this. And we just got another question that was asking, you know, when most of the emphasis right now in most programs and agencies is on existing compliance and in many cases doing a lot with very little, it's stressful and your day to day can be like putting out fires. And so how do you make room for motivating staff and making people feel bought into integrating customer experience as part of this work? Because I think the staff are the ones that ultimately where the rubber hits the road. And so if they're not bought in, then it's hard to make it work.

Anyone can answer that.

MS. RAJA: I'd love to speak to this from an outside perspective, because, again, not being internal to the local government. But what we've found has been sort of a game changer and people wanting to utilize any — but I mean incorporate any sort of this user experience is having them see it, having them see what comes back, right. You build the best thing and you think — and there's so much thought going into that build by the staff and they're really careful about trying to incorporate everything. And then you go talk to the user and then come back and it's usually just the small things. So I think that's the other piece of it, is they see that it's not that someone's coming back and saying this entire thing you built it wrong. It is, hey, would you be able to move that button over to the other side of the screen, or whatever it is, right. And so to understand that it's not a big list, but there are some insights that you never would have thought about that are coming from the user and making it more likely to use is just — it's really powerful to just have them see the actual feedback and understand that that's valuable, they can implement it, and they can see why they should be using that moving forward.

MS. GOGER: Yeah, I had a similar — I did a focus group in a job center once and many people were like well this is like a hidden secret. I don't want the secret to get out because it's such a great resource for us. But the one thing is, could you put some posters up to talk about training opportunities, because I don't know how to find those. And I t was like, oh, like how much does it cost to put up a poster, right. And so sometimes it's the really low hanging fruit.

I mean other times it's deeper, longer-term things, but sometimes there are things that you didn't think of that, you know, someone raises that are really easy to do and make a lot of people's lives easier.

And, Nikhil, do you have anything to add to this question around motivating staff and getting buy in?

MR. DESHPANDE: Yeah. I think it's really important to keep staff engaged in how things are going. You know, Meera touched upon it. For whatever role anyone played in a project, be it large or small, everyone is always invested to know how it is going, you know, how it is — and really is it helping people the way we intended to. In the past what we have seen is even though we have analytics for any numbers that have been drawn, they only get maybe circulated amongst a certain group or maybe leadership, but there was very few times when we saw that there was a transparency in those usage patterns for the success factors of certain services. And I think that is really important where —you know, if organizations focus more on publicly sharing how things are going. And that takes a little bit more of a challenging approach from leadership as well. But that is something that we saw within our little microcosm where we created an analytics program, what we call GAP, like Georgia Analytics Program, and we have a public dashboard. Now, it is of course a big part of the transparency measure of the governor, but also what that did was that actually made people and staff go and constantly see how things are going. And if there are a lot of numbers –– what we also have is we created a scoring system for every digital property. So if I'm working on say a certain application on a certain website, like if I go and see my score go up — and it also tells you like what went wrong and what you could be fixing. And it really could be something as small as oh, wait, you have a typo or a broken link and that's affecting your score, as opposed to a larger problem. I feel like having that is really important because that keeps the staff engaged. I've never really seen that level of engagement from staff across agencies to wanting to do better. And I don't know, maybe the gamification aspect of it is a little bit that gets people motivated, but it is so true to what you said, Annelies, like that's where the rubber hits the road.

And if the service is not delivering, if the customer citizens they are frustrated, the it reflects on the staff. It makes their job really hard. And if people enjoy their jobs, we know what happens. They move on and all of us within government know how hard it is to sort of place someone who walks away with like that institutional knowledge. So there's a lot of domino effect in having, you know, certain aspects where you keep people engaged, keep people motivated in doing better.

And to Sha's point about the North Star, all of those metrics really could be pointing to like what was your North Star and are we really fulfilling in marching towards that direction.

MS. GOGER: Thank you so much. Yeah, great point there about staff. Go ahead.

MS. RAJA: Sorry. Can I add a very quick thing? Because I realize everything — as I'm listening to all of this, I realize everything we're talking about is negative feedback that comes out of this process. There's also a lot of positive feedback that the users do have. And I think that's also very motivating. So I just wanted to pop that in there as well.

MS. GOGER: Absolutely. I've seen that as well and it can actually motivate staff quite a lot when they actually get that feedback for sure.

I had a question — there was a question that we got from the audience that I want to kind of blend it with one of my questions, which is like there are a lot of programs that are really underfunded and people have really basic needs like housing and food and safety. And governments roll –– an ability to respond to those things can be constrained by funding cuts and things like that sometimes. And so, you know, where is that tension — maybe, Sha, you could get at this a little bit — around can we really build trust in government through customer experience? Where does the equity and trust come from? Or is — like how do you distinguish between these different issues around what is the real potential to moves trust and build equity if like we're working in a scarcity situation?

MR. HWANG: I think that's an important question. And I think — I mean part of actually going out and talking to people impacted by the programs is not just — it is contending with the harsh and hard realities of people's experiences on these programs, right. It's not easy. And I think it's especially I think –– you know, I mean we — Nava was pulled in to support a state agency's unemployment system during the height of Covid and one thing we did is just start going to these Facebook groups where people were gathering online to try to figure out how to apply, how to sort through, who was getting stuck, looking at the sub reddit forums that people were trying to share notes. And people become outside policy experts just trying to call the call center hundreds of times over weeks and weeks trying to make rent, buy groceries. Just incredibly basic needs. So what I think — there — there are the material and essential needs. Like no website is going to address those types of things. But I do think there is a level of, you know — you know, what ultimately is a healthy and trusting relationship, right. What is the kind of onus on these public agencies. You know, it doesn't mean everything is perfect, but, Nikhil, to that point, it does mean —

what you were talking about around transparency — it does mean the problems are communicated, it does mean the expectations are set. And on our side, on the implementation side, we're not in the business of making promises, the government is through legislation, through programs and regulations, and things like that, but we are in the business of helping agencies keep those promises. And I think that's a — like without that, like if you are — regardless of what the benefit amount is, if you have to call 100 times to get 100 different answers about what the status of your claim is, if we can just build a way for you to check the status of your claim so you know what it is, there's no anxiety around it, there's maybe some concern around the time it might take or things like that. But those are I think significant levers to reduce some of the cognitive burden. I think (inaudible) recently issued some guidance talking about the psychological burden of navigating services. And I do think that is something that folks on the service delivery side have agency to improve.

MS. GOGER: Right. And there's an extent to which, yes, even if you're working in a scarcity environment, feeling like you're being treated like a human and with dignity and respect can go a long way I think. And that is very much within the purview of this work.

Do either of you have anything to add?

MS. RAJA: I think I'm just echoing exactly that point. Part of this is getting feedback and bringing people's voices in, but part of that also includes giving the people you're talking to access and a view into what you're doing as well. And I think that is really important. And then being able to circle back and say like this is how what you told us helped and this is how you drove change I think is really helpful as well.

MR. DESHPANDE: The only thing I can, you know, I guess add or really build upon what Sha said, was it is really important for us to be where people are and not just expect them to come to us. And in Covid times then people didn't know the subject matter. You know, the conversations were happening on social media, the conversations were not happening where typically they happen and it is really important for government agencies to be there and have that voice of information because, as we all know it's really easy for various I guess information points to be started to socialize and before you know it, you have a larger problem on your hands.

So really being in the conversation with all the right information can always point them back to your resources where the information is coming from. But that is something we always see that government agencies are slow in implementing only because either there could be internal challenges or maybe people not knowing. You know, we are literally just internally having a conversation about how like relevant is TikTok today and we already know a lot of dormant conversation that is being moved there and I'm personally intrigued about what happens and how it's handled.

But just as an example, I think we don't have the luxury of time in something like the Covid –– or something even locally, like maybe weather-related emergency happens. People know where to be and unless we don't need them there, it is really hard to keep up with that conversation.

MS. GOGER: Yes, I agree. And I think Amira really hit on this in the beginning by just saying that if you're having an emergency, the whole point of government is to be there when you're in a crisis, right. And if we can't be that for our citizens as a community, then that's where you start to lose the trust. And then all too often is the people who have multiple barriers or are particularly vulnerable who are most easily frustrated and deterred and excluded from programs and services that they're actually entitled to simply because they don't have the resources to really fight for the things that they're entitled to and get through that eligibility process or submit the verification or whatever.

And so, anyway, I know that we are right at the top of the hour, and so I want to really just extend a huge thank you to our guests here today. And I hope that those of you in the audience can share with us your experiences and what's going on in your area, whether it's Federal, state, or local or in your own community, because I truly believe that we're on the cusp of really starting to scale this work and bring this culture of learning and improvement in human centered design throughout our government.

So thank you so much for joining us and have a wonderful day.

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